Media Advisory

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For Immediate Release

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With U.S. Army Support, State Finals for FIRST Robotics this Weekend in Ypsilanti

DETROIT ARSENAL, WARREN, MI – The FIRST Robotics State Finals competition will have the Eastern Michigan Convocation Center buzzing with thousands of high school students' robotic creations, screaming fans, colorful mascots and the power of engineering, April 1-3, 2010.

After four intense weekends of district competition in March at seven sites across the state, 64 teams advanced to the state finals where they will show off their design and build skills learned this winter. FIRST Robotics (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) is an international phenomenon that evokes passion and fortitude from students who are exploring careers in science, engineering, math, medical technology and a host of related fields.

"FIRST Robotics competition is the timely medicine for tomorrow's economy," said Francois Castaing, director of FIRST in Michigan. "As it succeeds, it will not only help build a brighter future for Michigan, but it will put our state in the lead as the entire country wakes up to the economic challenges brought on by our flattening world."

The U.S. Army is lending a hand to the competition. The U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Design and Engineering Center (TARDEC) is a long-standing sponsor of the competition. TARDEC's Dr. Jim Overholt, who was recently named Senior Research Scientist in the field of Robotics, is scheduled to attend the competition and address attendees. TARDEC serves at the focal point for all Department of Defense ground robotics.

"FIRST is a valuable, time-tested program to introduce students to the world of robotics," explained Overholt. "By getting them involved at a young age, we hope to open doors of opportunities in science and technology."

Before the district competitions began, teams comprised of high school students, teachers and professional mentors from the business world had just six weeks to build a working robot for the new game this year. Each year the game changes and new robot designs are required. This provides new challenges for veteran teams and allows rookie teams to start out on more equal footing.

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The 2010 game is called “Breakaway” and in its most simplistic form could be called a soccer match between two teams of three robots each. Points are scored by kicking or pushing balls into your own goal on a field that is divided into three equal parts. The field dividers include a 12-inch tall mound that robots can climb over, and a small tunnel area the robot can be short enough to go under. More points can be scored in the closing seconds by robots that hang from bars above the two tunnels and additional points are awarded if a second robot can hang from a first robot on the same team (alliance).
“Unlike traditional sports where a tiny fraction of high school participants ever manage to turn pro, the First Robotics Competition program is a varsity sport-of-the-mind in which everyone can turn pro,” Castaing added.

ABOUT FIRST
Accomplished inventor Dean Kamen founded FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) in 1989 to inspire an appreciation of science and technology in young people. Based in Manchester, N.H., FIRST designs accessible, innovative programs to build self-confidence, knowledge, and life skills while motivating young people to pursue opportunities in science, technology, and engineering. To learn more about FIRST, go to www.usfirst.org, or for the state finals agenda and list of qualifying teams, visit www.firstinmichigan.org.

ABOUT TARDEC
Headquartered at the Detroit Arsenal in Warren, MI, TARDEC is the Nation's laboratory for advanced military automotive technology and serves as the Ground Systems Integrator for all Department of Defense (DOD) manned and unmanned ground vehicle systems. With roots dating back to the World War II era, TARDEC is a full life-cycle, systems engineering support provider-of-first-choice for all DOD ground combat and combat support weapons, equipment and vehicle systems. TARDEC develops and integrates the right technology solutions to improve Current Force effectiveness and provide superior capabilities for Future Force integration. TARDEC’s technical, scientific and engineering staff lead cutting-edge research and development in Ground Systems Survivability; Power and Mobility; Intelligent Ground Systems; Force Projection; and Vehicle Electronics and Architecture.

TARDEC is a major research, development and engineering center for the U.S. Army Research, Development and Engineering Command (RDECOM) and partner in the TACOM LCMC.

For more information about TARDEC, visit us at www.tardec.army.mil.
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